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ABSTRACT

One method of training principals and teachers to lead substantive change initiatives lies in partnership activities between schools and the local university. The Collaborative School Improvement Program (C-SIP) is a successful school-university partnership that focuses upon collaborative relationships between Eastern Michigan University and area schools to promote school improvement activities through building-level shared decision making. The C-SIP model offers a clearly delineated problem-solving approach that effectively combines theory, research, and practice. The individual school, the local school district, the intermediate school district, and Eastern Michigan University each assume important roles in ensuring the successful implementation of local projects. Faculty are recognized as equal shareholders in the change process, and administrative support is a prerequisite to a school's acceptance as a project school. Eastern Michigan University provides financial and technical assistance to each project site, and a faculty member is assigned as a facilitator in assisting with change efforts. The assumptions which form the foundation of the C-SIP model are listed, the C-SIP six-step process is outlined, typical school improvement goals are discussed, and implications for staff developers are identified. (Contains 23 references.) (JDD)

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Promoting School-University Partnerships: Professional Development of Teachers Through the Collaborative School Improvement Program

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> If school personnel do not consider new ways seen by others to be better or worthy of attention and renew their institutions accordingly, either alternative ways will be thrust upon them or new institutions and educational delivery systems will emerge. (Goodlad & Sirotnik, 1988, pp. 207-208)

Goodlad and Sirotnik (1988) warn that the educational reform movement is placing urgent demands upon educators to initiate dramatic changes within their schools. However, in spite of focused attempts by district staff development personnel, in many buildings principals and teachers resist school improvement activities, possibly because they lack the knowledge and skills necessary to lead substantive change initiatives. How can principals and teachers be more effectively trained to address their individual and organizational development needs? One solution lies in partnership activities between the schools and the local university.

After discussing school-university partnership activities, this article describes the Collaborative School Improvement Program (C-SIP), a successful school-university partnership that focuses upon collaborative relationships between Eastern Michigan University and area schools to promote school improvement activities through building-level shared decision making. The assumptions which form the foundation of the C-SIP model are listed, the C-SIP six-step process is outlined, typical school improvement goals are discussed, and implications for staff developers are identified.

School-University Partnership Activities

Collaborative partnerships between schools and universities have been in existence for several decades. Ranging from locally based short-term arrangements to long-standing

national efforts to restructure the educational system, these alliances have traditionally focused on mutually beneficial activities to improve both colleges and schools. The publication of A Nation at Risk by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 caused significant activity in the school-university arena and resulted in an explosion of newly established partnerships in the late 1980s (Greenberg, 1991; Gross, 1988; Wilbur & Lambert, 1991). Wilbur and Lambert (1991) identify 1,257 partnerships that had been formed by 1991; it is of little doubt that this number has increased substantially today.

Maloy and Jones (1987) list three key assumptions that support the case for partnerships: school-based consensus is important; collaborations add fresh resources, and enhanced communication can improve schools. "Partnerships must address the central business of educating children, youth, and teachers. The agenda must not be 'projects' around the edges" (Goodlad & Sirotnik, 1988, p. 222). These assertions indicate that effective school-university partnerships must have the central aim of school improvement--based upon collaboration--that promotes the process of change.

Partnership activities can be categorized into four general areas that provide: a) programs and services for students; b) programs and services for educators; c) coordination, development, and assessment of curriculum and instruction; and d) programs to mobilize, direct and promote sharing of educational resources (Wilbur & Lambert, 1991). Clark (1988) notes that "one of the primary intentions of school-university relations is to promote change" (p. 51). For long-lasting educational reform to occur, activities must genuinely address change and renewal and reach beyond the mere exchange of material goods and services. Personnel at both the university and school levels must dedicate themselves to shared activities that promote a greater understanding of each level of education with a primary goal of educational reform.

Teachers and principals working collaboratively with university faculty members may be the "last, best hope" for institutional change initiatives emerging from within the organizations. These partnerships can assist principals and teacher leaders in targeting school goals, identifying staff development needs, and promoting the effective development of both the organization and individuals.

The C-SIP Model

The Collaborative School Improvement Program originated in Michigan's Taylor School District in 1974 and was formally established at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in 1978 (Collaborative School Improvement, 1994). One of several programs within the College of Education's Office of Collaborative Education, C-SIP demonstrates the College's commitment to assisting area school districts with their change efforts. The goal of this program is to initiate school improvement and staff development activities at the building level through training teachers, administrators, and other school staff members in the collaborative process of shared decision making. Dedicated to constructive change and the improvement of instructional outcomes, the C-SIP model offers a clearly delineated problem-solving approach that effectively combines theory, research, and practice. University faculty members serve as resource personnel to facilitate change efforts within the schools.

The foundation of the C-SIP structure is collaboration. The individual school, the local school district, the intermediate school district, and Eastern Michigan University each assume important roles in ensuring the successful implementation of local projects. This process empowers the school staff, recognizing faculty as equal shareholders in the change process as they collaboratively identify building needs that are in alignment with their school improvement plan and district mission statement. Administrative support is a prerequisite to a school's acceptance as a project school, and the building principal works collaboratively with his/her staff in effecting positive change. The key to the program's

vitality is local ownership since the building faculty has the responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating their own staff development activities.

Eastern Michigan University provides financial and technical assistance to each project site, and a facilitator is assigned to assist in each school's change efforts. Facilitators are EMU faculty members, representing departments in several colleges throughout the university, whose role is to guide the project team through the C-SIP process. This process builds sufficient building- and district-level strength to sustain continuous school improvement efforts when formal university support ceases. EMU facilitators have also provided training at the Michigan intermediate school district level to develop locally based cadres of personnel who can assume facilitator roles in school districts.

C-SIP Assumptions

Several tenets concerning change form the basis for school improvement. The Collaborative School Improvement Program Handbook (1994) lists eleven critical assumptions that guide the implementation of improvement process (pp. 5-6). These assumptions, which are firmly grounded in current theory and research of the literature concerning organizational change, are as follows:

- Meaningful change occurs as a process, not as an event (Avolio, 1994; Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Glickman, 1993; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987).
- Individuals behave the way they do because it makes sense to them. Every person is logical in his or her own context (Festinger, 1957; Hall & Hord, 1987; Zimbardo, 1969).
- Individuals who will be affected by decisions must be involved in making them. Shared decision making builds personal ownership and collective commitment (Bandura &

Wood, 1989; Chance, 1992; Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Herman & Herman, 1994; Schlechty, 1990).

- The most critical variable in effective teaching and leading is the extent to which one can interact with and release the fullest potential of others (Atwater & Bass, 1994; Cunningham & Gresso, 1993).
- Since effective change is a human process involving the individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions, and which can cause disequilibrium, various support systems are necessary (Avolio, 1994; Duke, 1987; Sergiovanni, 1994).
- While top administrators cannot create effective change by themselves, they can and must be an integral part of the process as they facilitate change (Chance, 1992; Duke, 1987; Schlechty, 1990).
- Since it cannot be presumed that faculty inherently possess leadership skills, any change model must provide for leadership development (Avolio, 1994; Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Herman & Herman, 1994).
- Formalized outside intervention is necessary for significant changes to occur in behavior, and continuous communication is essential to incorporate these changes (Chance, 1992; Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Herman & Herman, 1994).
- Participants should include discussions of current literature, research and practice in their deliberations (Duke, 1987; Glickman, 1993).
- While external consultant help is necessary and important, direction for change must come from local sources (Duke, 1987; Schlechty, 1990).
- An organization's fundamental beliefs are the driving forces and the ultimate reasons behind every action (Chance, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1994).

Shared Commitments

Schools selected as C-SIP project sites enter into a three-year contract that clearly delineates the shared responsibilities of both the schools and the university. The C-SIP

office provides training in the six-step process for improving instructional outcomes; a university facilitator to collaborate with the school staff; a nominal annual grant to fund project activities (normally $2,500-3,000); three annual training and development conferences; access to a library containing books, periodicals and videotapes on school improvement and change activities; and periodic newsletters which include relevant information on staff development issues and highlight the accomplishments of project schools.

Since a high level of individual commitment to the project is vital for substantive change to occur, the school faculty must decide to participate by a vote of not less than 80%. A School Improvement Team is formed and meets at least monthly with the university facilitator. This team, with input from the entire building staff, develops a School Improvement Plan, determines strategies for implementing the goals identified in the plan, establishes a budget, monitors the project, and annually evaluates their progress toward the identified project goals. Schools agree to use C-SIP funding only for consultants and trainers, materials, conference attendance, employment of substitute teachers, and stipends where necessary. Since the intent of the partnership is to internalize the capacity for continuous change within the system and individuals, funds cannot be used for routine purchases of equipment or student materials. The school must also agree to send three representatives to attend the fall and spring training seminars. A building administrator commits to attend the winter Administrators' Conference; the superintendent and other central office administrators are also invited to attend this conference.

The C-SIP Six-Step Process

Before a school is officially accepted into the program, a presentation is made to the district central office administration, the project site is identified, and a profile that includes student and faculty demographic data of the school is prepared. Each project school adheres to the clearly defined six-step process outlined below.

Step 1: Awareness, Readiness, Commitment. The university facilitator meets with the building staff to review relevant research concerning the change process and to explain the C-SIP model. The building profile data are shared with the staff and potential areas for improvement are discussed. The building staff votes by secret ballot to enter into the collaborative agreement with the university.

Step 2: Establishing School Improvement Goals. With the assistance of the facilitator and/or another consultant, the staff conducts an interactive needs assessment to identify building needs, reaches consensus on the most critical needs, identifies a priority goal, develops strategies for achieving that goal, and selects a building School Improvement Team to serve as the planning committee.

Step 3: Development and Approval of Plan. With appropriate staff involvement, the School Improvement Team writes the building plan, which includes the priority goal and objectives and activities geared toward achieving the goal; sets the timeline; and identifies procedures for evaluating the plan's progress. Approval of the plan is required by the staff, the district central administration, and the EMU C-SIP office.

Step 4: Implementation and Monitoring. While this is true of all other stages in the process, total staff support is crucial during the implementation phase. Staff members engage in professional development activities that relate to the school improvement plan, incorporating new teaching strategies and using materials developed during the project. As emerging needs are identified, the plan is modified to assure optimum achievement of goals. The facilitator assists the staff in locating the additional resources and expertise required to address the goals, thereby achieving the fullest potential of their project. The School Improvement Team meets regularly, with the university facilitator in attendance, to monitor and coordinate the building's progress toward the identified goals and provides monthly updates to the building staff. During this stage the faculty receives training in the change process so they can successfully initiate school improvement activities without the

need for outside intervention. Through this empowerment, teachers learn their important roles as change agents and develop the necessary skills to be leaders within their schools.

Step 5: Evaluation. Since the building staff own the project, they are responsible for its continuous evaluation. At the end of each year, the staff compare their current school profile data with the baseline data contained in their original school profile. The facilitator assists with data collection and the evaluation. The end-of-year report, containing an evaluation of the building's procedure for achieving the goals and the quantitative outcomes of the project, is reviewed and filed in the C-SIP office. This annual report assists the staff in tracking their progress and discloses any needed modifications in the school improvement plan.

Step 6: Reassessment of the Three-Year Plan. At the end of the three-year commitment, the total building staff is actively engaged in the process of identifying school improvement goals. At this point formal C-SIP involvement is no longer necessary since the staff has now mastered and internalized the six-step change process as a method for on-going school improvement. University financial support is withdrawn at this time, and the building staff identifies alternative funding sources to support continuing change efforts (Collaborative School Improvement, 1994).

School Improvement Projects

Since the inception of the EMU Collaborative School Improvement Program, over 115 schools in 37 southeastern Michigan school districts have participated in C-SIP projects. Approximately 15 projects are funded annually. While the focus of each project varies with the needs of the individual school, an overview of current projects illustrates the range of school improvement activities in a typical year.

The C-SIP office has funded projects in fourteen school districts located in six Michigan counties during the 1994-95 academic year. Project sites include one pre-school, six elementary schools, two middle schools, two special education centers, and two high

schools, located in varied demographic locations that range from sparsely populated rural areas, to suburban districts, to industrial Flint and large urban Detroit. Project goals focus on student academic and behavioral skills development. A partial listing of project goals is as varied as the schools served: improved student self-esteem; family involvement; enhanced school climate; improved student conduct; infusion of the African-centered perspective into the curriculum; conflict resolution skills development; curriculum and program evaluation; improvement of standardized test scores; activities related to state accreditation outcomes; computer literacy and increased use of technology; implementation of interdisciplinary curriculum; and critical thinking/higher order thinking skills development. Year-end evaluations by the local School Improvement Teams have consistently noted high levels of teacher and administrator involvement in building projects, satisfactory progress toward accomplishment of project goals, and high levels of faculty satisfaction with the outcomes of their building-initiated school improvement efforts.

The C-SIP process has traditionally emphasized change and school improvement at the building level. While continuing this original focus, in recent years the Collaborative School Improvement Program staff has experimented with expanding the model to include district-wide change initiatives. During the 1994-95 school year, three district projects were funded; one focused on K-12 curriculum integration of technology and a second focused on parental involvement and student self-esteem. The third is working closely with a university facilitator to develop a model for systemic change and to implement shared decision making at the school district level. These successful projects hold promise for initiating improvement activities at the district level in addition to the local school building level. The district projects are of particular interest for administrators who are responsible for district-wide staff development activities since, in many instances, a climate that supports school improvement must first be established at the district level.

Implications for Staff Developers

Collaboration and support on the part of the staff development administrator in the school district is the sine qua non of success in C-SIP initiatives. The staff developer must be an active participant during each of the six steps described above. Specific assistance which only the staff developer can provide includes the following:

- Creating a climate supportive of change.
- Personally modeling effective risk-taking behaviors.
- Facilitating the contact necessary with other groups and individuals in the organization.
- Assisting team members to learn to work together as a group.
- Helping team members to understand the "big picture" of school improvement from the organizational perspective.
- Reinforcing progress toward goal achievement.
- Procuring the organizational resources to support and institutionalize the change being implemented.

Such support from the staff developer within the school organization, coupled with the technical assistance and resources from the university, insures successful implementation of the improvement process for the benefit of everyone, staff and students alike.

Conclusion

School-university partnerships create positive changes in teachers' and principals' daily experiences that personally and professionally energize, reward, and renew them (Maloy & Jones, 1987). Operating with a true sense of collegiality, such partnerships are examples of a process wherein "all members feel a sense of responsibility toward the group's success and are committed to the work of the group" (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993, p. 100). In so doing, teachers begin to embrace the responsibilities inherent in their expanded roles, looking beyond their personal needs to the needs of their larger school

community. In a similar manner, university professors also reach beyond their limited institutional roles and grow in their understanding and practice.

Eastern Michigan University's Collaborative School Improvement Program offers a proven method for empowering faculties to assume active roles in school improvement efforts. Schools become more effective when change efforts are initiated at the building level and when faculties assume personal responsibility for their identified school improvement goals. C-SIP is also beneficial to the university, affording opportunities for university faculty to provide professional and technical assistance in K-12 educational settings, to conduct research, and to enrich their teaching as a result of their continuing experiences with elementary and secondary educational institutions. University facilitators trained in the C-SIP six-step process can also utilize this process when engaged in university-level restructuring activities.

The keys to successful implementation of the model are collaboration and meaningful support. It is critical for the C-SIP process to be a truly supportive relationship between the two institutions, as demonstrated by the positive interaction of the people involved. As Osajima (1989) asserts, "effective collaboration hinges on the quality of human relationships between school and university people" (p. 123). Teachers, principals, and university faculty must work as equal partners with the common goal of school improvement.

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